

February 15, 2022

A government that supports the arts and humanities is not engaging in philanthropic activity but assuring the conditions of its own flourishing.

Benjamin Barber, author

Dear Co-Chair Senator Osten, Co-Chair Rep. Walker, Vice-Chair Senator Hartley, Vice-Chair Rep. Dathan, Vice-Chair Rep. Nolan, and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am submitting this testimony for HB 5037 on behalf of the Neighborhood Music School. I know many of you are familiar with our work and our mission, and have been great advocates in the past.

We are extremely grateful for your support over many years and it is no exaggeration to say that without government funding, NMS would not have gotten through the last 2 years. It is also no exaggeration to say that without Neighborhood Music School many of the **2,500 students** we serve each week and the **150 teaching artists** we employ would not have had the support to get through this time, either.

As we moved through the pandemic, at every turn we worked hard to keep people healthy. This is a huge undertaking for an organization that hosts as many as 4,000 people each week coming from 80 different cities and towns across the state, including our youngest students who are not yet eligible to be vaccinated. However when we considered closing our doors and moving all our programming online, we heard loud and clear that for the mental health of our community, we needed to maintain in-person teaching. "NMS must stay open; NMS grounds us; We need to stay connected to our teachers, our most important mentors," they said.

This idea of arts education as a life preserver is not radical. In fact, NMS was founded more than 100 years ago as a social service agency providing free music lessons to the local immigrant population. These lessons extended far beyond the acquisition of basic music skills and prepared students for success outside of the music studio, while also providing a stable and welcoming community, a home away from home.

Today, we take great pride in the fact that we have grown to be the largest community arts education organization in the state, and one of the largest in the entire country. Every other similar organization of our size is in a large metropolitan area and receives considerable state funding. When I speak at national conferences and panels about the far-reaching impact of our work, I am always asked how an organization like ours exists in a state as small as Connecticut.

I hope we can continue to say that we exist because our state values and invests in the profound impacts of Arts Education. Your partnership is critical to our school's existence.

Over the last seven years, Neighborhood Music School has refocused our commitment to access by tripling our financial aid awards. During this same period, our state funding has been reduced by almost half. Our commitment to equity is dependent on your support. We ask that you return our funding to its previous level of \$150,000.



I acknowledge the challenges you face in deciding how to allocate funds and prioritize your support. Where does Neighborhood Music School fit?

Economic Development?

Jobs?

Arts?

Support for artists?

Education?

Early Childhood?

Seniors?

Equity and access?

Out of school support?

Learners with Special Needs?

Health and Wellness?

Community centers providing a safe space?

The answer is that by supporting Neighborhood Music School, you are prioritizing all of these things. **NMS is a critical investment.**

I'd like to share two final thoughts about what makes Neighborhood Music School so unique.

- 1) **There may be no place in the entire state that brings together so many different types of people to learn side by side.** If we look around the country at all of the problems we are facing with "otherism", there also may be nothing more important than having a place where people of all backgrounds, races, ages, genders, and economic means come together. NMS is that place.
- 2) Our school is open 7 days a week, 48 weeks a year, with 32 classrooms, all filled for multiple hours of teaching and learning every day. Each year we engage in more than **30,000 hours of instruction.** We are proud to provide this unparalleled amount of support and service to so many constituents across our state.

Thank you,

Noah Bloom

Noah Bloom
Executive Director
Neighborhood Music School